Coal consumption by steam engines

270. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that decrease in coal consumption by steam engines has not been commensurate to the extent of decrease in railway traffic carried by steam engines;

(b) if so; the details for the last three years and reasons therefor;

(c) the estimated yearly loss to the railways on this account and steps taken to avert such losses; and

(d) the average percentage of ash content in coal received by railways during the last three years?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI C. K. JAFFER SHARIEF): (a) No, Sir, The reduction in coal consumption compares well with the reduction in traffic carried by steam traction. As against a reduction of 33.4 per cent in the traffic carried by steam traction, the coal consumption has come down by 34.4 per cent in last three years.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

(d) The average percentage of ash in coal received by the railways, during the last three years, was 23 per cent.

Conversion of metre gauge railway tracks to broad gauge

271. SHRI SURESH KALMADI: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Indian Railways have ordered enmasse conversion of metre gauge railway tracks to broad gauge in the country; and

(b) if so, what is the expenditure involved and by when the work is likely to be completed?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI C. K. JAFFER SHARIEF): (a) No, Sir. The Railways have, however, taken up the Project Unigauge for rapid economic development of the country. Accordingly an Action Plan for conversion of 13191 kms. of MG/NG lines into BG has been prepared. Out of this Action Plan, 6,000 kms. are targetted for completion during the VIII Plan and the balance in the subsequent plans. An outlay of Rs. 3900 crores is earmarked for 8th Plan.

eRlease of berths/seats in trains

272. SHRI O. P. KOHLI: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the berths and seats in the trains are not released on the recommendations of the M.Ps while the same are being released on the recommendations of the officials of his Ministry;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor and the steps taken to give first priority to the recommendations of the M.Ps than the recommendations of the officials irrespective of the status of the persons to travel or his urgency;

(c) if not, reasons therefor; and

(d) the details of authorities on whose recommendations the seats/berths are to be released in the order of preference?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI C. K. JAFFER SHARIEF): (a) to (d) A limited number of berths/seats have been earmarked as emergency quota to meet the urgent travel requirements of high official requisition holders, Ministers, M.Ps and VIPs and other emergency demands received from various sources including M.Ps, railway officials etc.

While allotting the quota, the competent Railway Official is required to take into account all relevant factors like status of the passengers travelling, urgency of travel etc.